

## Off the Wall

Chicago Sun-Times, Aug 27, 2006 by Misha Davenport

'DZINE: SOMEWHERE OVER THE RAINBOW'

When: Through Oct. 29

Where: Chicago Cultural Center's Michigan Avenue Galleries, 78 E. Washington

Admission: Free

Phone: (312) 744-6630

There was a time in the early 1980s when the artist born Carlos Rolon could be seen around town armed with spray cans, creating colorful murals inspired by the emerging graffiti art movement, Jean-Michel Basquiat and Fred Braithwaite (a.k.a. Fab Five Freddy) in particular. In some ways, the streets were his classroom and building walls were his canvases. While his earlier work as a graffiti artist is still visible around the city, school has been out for quite some time. The 36-year-old artist now known as Dzine (pronounced "design") has gone from street art to fine art, attracting critical acclaim and commercial success in

Europe and Japan with site-specific installations in hot colors, motifs and patterns reminiscent of Pop art, fusing punk, funk and psychedelia.

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Last year he had a show, "Gangster Boogie," at Paris' BlackBlock/ Palais de Tokyo and was a featured artist in Chicago gallerist Monique Meloche's "Beautiful Otherness" at Madrid's ARGO show. "His most recent work," Shannon Fitzgerald, wrote in the catalog for "Punk Funk," his 2005 installation at the Contemporary Art Museum of St. Louis, "moves between a purposeful roughness and a refined and sophisticated formalism."

But even as Dzine's work is increasingly acclaimed internationally and locally -- his latest installation, "Over the Rainbow," continues at the Chicago Cultural Center through Oct. 29 -- he still feels like an outsider in the city where he grew up.

"In New York, you get the sense that it's about community; all the artists support each other and go to each other's openings," he says. "The Chicago art scene is like recess with the cool kids who don't want to play with you or let you in their group."

Paul Klein, executive director of the Chicago Art Project, an initiative to bring greater recognition to Chicago art and artists, says Dzine has covered a lot of ground in his still-young career. "He's come a long way from spray-painting buildings."

But that, he says, has yet to sink in for some of Dzine's peers.

"His past has restricted the amount of respect he has gotten," Klein says. "He went from tagging his name on buildings and working as a graffiti artist to exhibiting internationally, but there are those in the Chicago arts community who don't necessarily see him as a peer."

For his part, Dzine's attitude is that of an artist who has moved on.

"It was never my mission to bring the street into the museums or the galleries," he says. "I never had a desire to do it. It's part of my history, but it's not the current focus."

#### FAMOUS WHEN IT'S POSTHUMOUS

While many artists like Dzine often feel their work and talent go unnoticed within both the city and its art community, Klein isn't so sure it's just artists who are being overlooked.

"Look at writers, musicians and sports figures," he says. "Is [White Sox star player] Paul Konerko a hero? No, but if he was living in New York he would be. Chicago is a blue-collar town that grew up. Blue-collar people are not prone to putting people on a pedestal. The mentality is really an extension of the stockyards. It's a sort of get your [butt] back to work and we'll acknowledge you when you're dead."

Dzine seems to have a particular resentment for the Museum of Contemporary Art, which hosted a show of his work in 2002.

"The Museum of Contemporary Art should be setting the standard, but in the last year or so I think the Chicago Cultural Center has been putting on better exhibits of contemporary art," Dzine says.

Specifically, Dzine wasn't happy with how the MCA handled his show.

"The director of Paris' Palais de Tokyo flew in to give a talk for the opening," he says. "The museum could only get a handful of people to show up and they planned a wedding reception the same night of my opening that had more people. I was like, what the f--- ? I took that same exhibit to Japan, drew a huge crowd and sold one of the works opening night."

No one at the MCA was available for comment.

#### 'SOMETHING RAW AND IN-YOUR-FACE'

In the past, Dzine's exhibits have had a musical element to them and the current exhibit is no different. One wall features a jeweled turntable mounted to it. Electronica music piped into the exhibit is from Ninjatunes recording artists The Cinematic Orchestra.

"My work isn't religious or political," Dzine says, "But it is about music and sound."

Ironically, "Rainbow" contains references to graffiti that Dzine says is intentional. He collaborated with graffiti artist Mike Genovese on the installation.

"I wanted to have these separate pieces and Mike's work has this raw element of street graffiti, so I'm basically juxtaposing my images with his. There's something raw and in-your-face about it.

"It's a bit of a f--- you," he says with a grin. "But in a non-malicious way."

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#### **Bibliography for "Off the Wall"**

Misha Davenport "[Off the Wall](#)". Chicago Sun-Times. Aug 27, 2006.

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